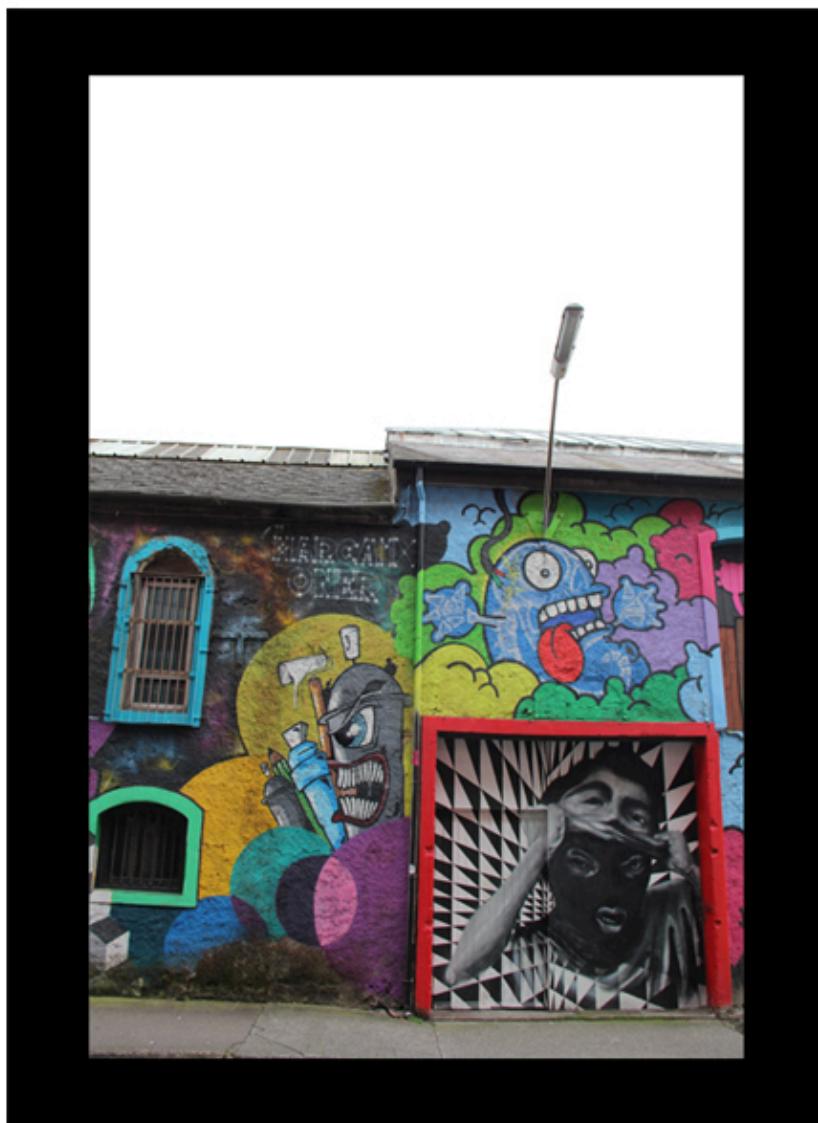


I F B O D I E S H A D Z I P P E R S



Brett Olsen

IF BODIES HAD ZIPPERS

POEMS BY BRETT OLSEN

IN 2015
A BIG SAD
APRIL – DECEMBER
“YOU’VE GOT TO BE TOUGH!”

For my brother Brendan

KIT & CABOODLE

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umbrella

when i was four or five,
i would watch clouds move

and think,
“the earth is rotating,”

because i was stupid.
when i was six-to-twelve,

i would watch clouds move,
and i would see different shapes,

animals and vampires,
in the sky.

now i watch what i eat.
i try to exercise at least

twenty minutes
every day,

and it just
looks like rain.

catching my reflection in a store window

the necessity of shrinking
into something smaller:

notice the parts of the body
conflicting as a whole.

overcompensate the wrong muscles
as you stand straight into the sky,

chest puffed with
arms cocked back.

a big balloon is just
easier to pop,

no posthumous
justifications,

like an astronaut's death
set against a kid who dresses like one.

take deep breaths and attempt
to regulate your pulse:

envision yourself releasing helium
as you retreat into yourself,

your arms
no longer clumsy,

deflating smaller
and backward

through adolescence,
past first communion,

breath to breath
back to earth again.

if bodies had zippers

quick-cut at the mirror
to reciprocate feedback,

and is seven years really
the worst you can do?

chew on the pieces
because you mean business—

deter the dentist
from his casual talk

as he works and wishes
that he wasn't at work.

the mind can never feel the sun:

 how the body crisps when
 it consumes too much.

the mind never travels
while the body two-steps

with kitsch sandwich shops,
cigarettes bought in bulk,

or happy-hour-deals served by
malnourished bartenders.

i touch my hand with my other hand
but cannot feel what others can:

 we come to a boil at all the wrong times.

if bodies had zippers,
away we would go—

our steam leaving nothing but a cold dew.

with enough distractions

water before coffee
tricks are what's best

for a regular
body

gets lost
easy

so keep it
easy and linear

use less
words

apple
a day

when in Rome
you are in Rome

do you
meditate

or diet
or talk

about your
diet

what traits do
you desire in

other
humans

what exceptions
exist when

you are
in Rome

what are the winters
like in Rome

what do
the Romans say?

i don't feel like talking about the weather today

i watch a live broadcast
of the Baltimore protest

before the bartender switches
over to Family Guy.

all the world

how many 11 o'clock news transitions
until you admit that the bad shit is winning

with detailed infographs
that condense bullets

into brightly lit,
easily digestible,

matter-of-facts?
how far-gone are we

to repeat the word TRAGEDY
before transitioning to another

collection of cute puppies,
celebrity tweets,

or best Halloween costume
as voted by You,

The Viewer?

find the humanity that the television lacks
when i ask the French couple how they feel about Cork,

and they LEARN ENGLISH, HAVE JOBS,
and are VERY HAPPY.

think "you're not from around here"
as if i were back in Cleveland,

watching construction through a window as somebody
tells me i wouldn't understand because of my age.

spades

some kid fondly recollects
my twenty-third birthday with

I HAD UNPROTECTED SEX
WITH TWO GIRLS IN ONE NIGHT,

and i want to neglect
the little empathy i've kept,

draw lines in the sand
and ridicule you down

to the nurtured puzzle pieces that
your upbringing smashed together.

i want to draw lines in the sand
indifferently with my foot

as she grabs my hand with her left,
as she grabs his hand with her right,

and there's a justification
for justifications

if you just
listened.

i think about Ghem
telling me to

CALL A SPADE
A SPADE

before addressing his dog as
GOOD BOY,

and i want to draw four lines in the sand
and sit in the middle.

polyamory

venn diagram

or maybe
a sandwich

void

we're all egomaniacs who want
to make some kind of impact,

who can't just leave a place
the way they found it:

a few acquaintances gather on Sundays
in the basement of a bar that you can smoke in,

and they talk about how strong they are
and the boys who didn't work out.

they say hi when they see me,
then they dive back into it.

i sit and catch phrases,
"honey, I need to tell you something,"

but i'm disinterested
and insignificant.

if i eat less,
i exist less,

no blood on these hands,
no weight on these shoulders:

just like before you were born,
just like that again.

too proud to expire

thinking about killing myself,
but i can't.

the sink is filled with bowls of
old Greek Yogurt,

chunky and concrete.
i've never seen something

transform so easily.
you can't kill yourself

and leave behind a full sink—
“how pathetic!”

killing yourself currently is like
phoning in the eulogy.

envision my dumb body
with a permanent dumb face

being put in a box,
then the box is put in a hole—

epitaph reads “simplify!”
but no one gets the joke.

parking lot empties,
eventually someone

starts locking up
the place.

envision my ghost haunting my family,
my legacy reduced to

“it smells like spoiled yogurt.”

video game checkpoint

i think about my brother's guinea pig
that died on Easter when we were kids

and how my brother believed
that the timing was right

for Rocky to wake up
if we just waited three days.

i think about the disappointments
that slap sense into children,

or how the calmest adults
appear cold to the touch,

their grief tucked away by way of
photographs placed in nightstands.

i think about the different disappointments
that formed and followed my brother,

each one another slap
on a reddening cheek,

like late-stage Tetris blocks
for someone who disliked Tetris.

i think about teenage rebellion:
bad crowds, stupid haircuts,

feeling ashamed as
your balls drop—

no obvious
correlation.

today we don't play.
today we eat bagels!

eventually chew on the words
leaving and not leaving my mouth,

and i wonder if i brought up the guinea pig,
if the blocks would have fallen differently,

if we could have chosen three letters for first place
or just played a different game altogether.

couch consumption

watch The Babadook and wish
my grief was personified by

a slender monster that floats from
closets to ceilings.

my muscles relax on the same couch
that my brother preferred,

and maybe if i shut my eyes,
i could atrophy completely.

think about curses and
vague notions of energy—

maybe you swallowed
what he was choking on? -

and realize the similarities run deeper
than hair color or sense of humor.

if this monster locked itself
in our basement,

i'd find the energy to let it starve,
and it would shrivel,

cotton-mouthing,
shrieking for a plate of worms.

headless mannequins

we both wanted to be headless mannequins
searching for ways to silence the noise upstairs

while the remainder of the body
did what the body does.

we wanted the mind
to wash the hands

while the hands
did what hands do.

maybe as kids
every print our feet made

was something inconceivable,
but eventually we saw wrinkles,

and the road not taken
already had hand-printed cement,

gum-stuck in the underneath,
and what's the point in walking

when dad can
carry us home?

there's no shame in
choosing deep waters—

legs wiggling
to stay afloat—

or for knowing that if big waves are fun,
then bigger waves are better,

but we both hoped nothing below
would make us sink to their level.

mantra

think about how everything
is leading up to everything.

question your own significance
and think of ways to be significant.

notice all battles,
big or small:

jalapeños vs. ulcers,
beer or wine.

promise yourself you'll
get better at noticing,

instinctually know you'll
start to notice yourself.

if heaven is where
you want to be,

purgatory is
wherever you are.

anchor

there are people who believe
that the moon affects mood,

and THE BODY'S MOSTLY WATER,
SO IT KIND OF MAKES SENSE.

other people dabble
in the occult with candles—

witches who Google
the truths of Tarot,

whose black sweaters compliment
their near neon leggings.

some hide with irony
while searching for meaning

because to believe anything
makes you a vulnerable being.

others take pride in
the town they are from

like your mom fucked your dad and
that's why GO CLEVELAND.

some people stay still and learn to complain
while saying things like,

FUCK THIS PLACE
WE HATE WINTER
WHY DO WE LIVE HERE
SERIOUSLY WE ALL HAVE DEGREES
YOU WORK IN A FACTORY
WE WORK IN RESTAURANTS
WHY THE FUCK DO WE LIVE HERE,

almost every day.

the markets we become lost in

i've been sponging
your words regarding

solidarity
fuck all cops
vintage clothes
passionate drunks
garage rock revival
the importance of lentils
Etsy accounts with angular cats,

but you trip for a bit when i ask,
YES—BUT HOW ARE YOU?,

and i don't believe you are invested in me
when you parrot the same sentiment back:

if you stay in the ice cream aisle long enough,
someone with a sweet tooth will find you.

nonintrusive party animal

someone drinks a beer and talks about
what he finds attractive in a stupid scientific fashion like:

If you got a good ass, you don't need tits...
If I don't want to fuck you, I'm going to treat you differently;
I'm going to make fun of you and treat you like one of my friends.

i think about dichotomies and
feel like i'm back in high school

as if a series of shitty words could construct
a Twilight Zone-Time Machine:

it works,
but you'll hate where you end up.

i say something like,
"she seems nice to me,"

and feel ashamed
for not saying more.

maybe bonfires don't spark
ideological shifts.

maybe different time,
different place:

i question my convictions and leave,
take a shower to wash off the smoke.

boss battle

i need to be better

no compliments

i wish hellfire were real

open and shut

this isn't my upbringing

if hellfire were real

adjust to the climate

talk a lot of myself

if hellfire were real

mostly myself

saying

i need to be better

if hellfire were real

shut me up

descriptions of the rock that hit you in the face don't matter

i can't flush away late July, 2015,
or the way i screamed FUCKING FUCK OFF
to every car that was between my car and the hospital
with the little breath that was still mine as my nose watered
my mustache with a mixture of mucus and Ooo's and Why's?,
or the way it started to rain immediately after Randy told me what happened,
and i hate pills but give me two Tylenol because my head never felt this way.
it took me five months before i could say
not all pencils have erasers
and actually mean it,

so if i could flush
this past summer,

what do you think
i would do?—

it's warmer here,
but i write things like this
instead of going outside.

one of my roommates moved from Ibiza
as i moved from The States,

and together we fix
our broken languages,

poco a poco:

tomorrow—you clean,
and I am very angry,

which is said with an accent that reminds me
i am, actually, very hungry,

but when she told me she had A BIG SAD,
i said her words were perfect before introducing new vocabulary.

carousel

my zip-locked thoughts
release through a fresh pinprick—

i guess the alcohol
helps & hurts.

fixate only on
a thousand yards

as Iván tells me the humidity here
will freeze your bones at night—

realizations sweet-talk regrets
with the charisma some people
wish they possessed.

it's like when one door closes,
another feeling that a cage has dropped

with a new stream of what-if's
trying to push their way into my lungs.

stick the past in a zip-locked bag
as you begin to feel fat on some skinny street,

where you'll become lost
if you don't know where you're going.

ebb & flow

one person leaves early
as a new child's conceived:
road construction continues effortlessly.